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THE ARMY OF THE POTOMAC

SKETCH

THE PHANTOM COLUMN

POEM

BY

HORATIO C. KING

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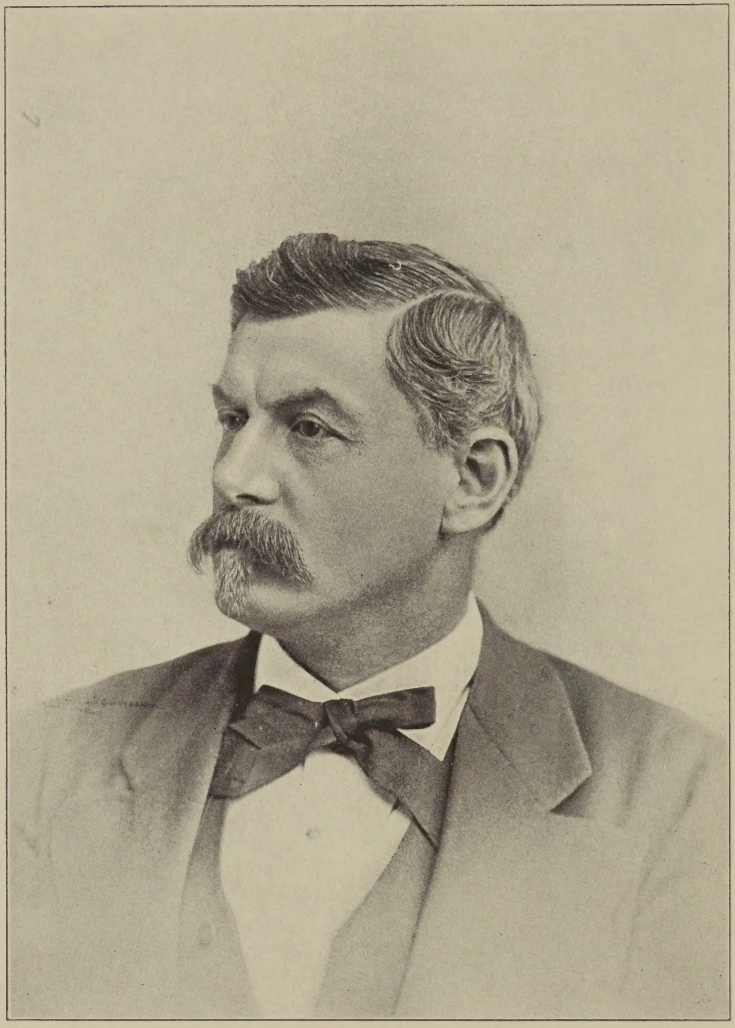

MAJOR-GENERAL GEORGE B. MCCLELLAN, U. S. A.

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THE ARMY OF THE POTOMAC.

By Gen. Horatio C. King, LL.D.

(Extract of Letter from Mrs. McClellan on reading the following article.)

Jefferson, "The Jefferson," August 31, 1897.

Dear General King:

I must send you a line to thank you for the beautiful article you have written on my husband. It is one of the most satisfactory that has been written, and I cannot tell you how touched I am that you have written it. So many cruel things have been written about him that I appreciate this more than I can tell you, as what you have said, you have said so well. * * * *

Again thanking you for what you have done, I am, dear General King,

Yours very sincerely,

ELLEN M. McCLELLAN.

The ignorant and idiotic cry from the rear of "On to Richmond!" had precipitated an engagement at Bull Run between raw and undisciplined recruits. Both sides were defeated, but the Union forces realized it first and withdrew to Washington to commence the real study of war. And the first requisite was a competent instructor. Western Virginia had been attracting considerable attention, for there McClellan and Rosecrans had been carrying on some warfare in a practical way as laid down by the rules of war. McDowell having voluntarily relinquished the command without dishonor, the young engineer from Ohio was called to Washington the day after the battle of Bull Run. The North, awakened to the fact that war is not a picnic, responded promptly and lavishly to the call for men and munitions, and McClellan began at once the difficult task of organizing the mass of raw civilians into a magnificent and cohesive army. Educated to the profession of war, he exhibited at once his marvelous ability for organization and discipline, and the heterogeneous mass which gave to Washington the appearance of being in the hands of a uniformed mob, soon felt the force of his genius. With rare skill he fashioned that grand machine which was not changed in any material detail until, flushed with victory, it saw the beaten and almost starved veterans of that seemingly invincible Army

COMPLIMENTS OF
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of Northern Virginia lay down their arms at Appomattox and melt away like snow under the influence of an April sun. A third of a century has passed away, and with it, happily, the passions which animated the critics of the first commander, who lived long enough to witness a great change in public sentiment, and to have his patriotism and ability almost universally acknowledged. The silly aspersions upon his loyalty are confined now mainly to the generation of ill-read youths who were in their swaddling clothes when he was standing as a wall against the vast hosts which flaunted the "stars and bars" almost in sight of the Capital, which he saved by his hard-won victory at Antietam. One fact is universally conceded, namely: that no commander of prominence ever had more completely the devoted affection of his army. It was the magnetic influence which Napoleon exercised, and which gave to McClellan the loving sobriquet with which he was always mentioned, "Little Mac." It accompanied him through all the vicissitudes of his active command; it followed him into retirement and throughout his life; and when the sudden summons came, taps were sounded and the lights were out, no man of that great army who served under him but dropped a tear for "Little Mac," the brave commander, the thoughtful friend and the Christian gentleman.*

* A notable exhibition of this affection came under my personal observation. The Society of the Army of the Potomac was organized in New York City in 1869. McClellan, Burnside, Hooker, Meade, Sheridan and many other distinguished officers were present. It was naturally expected and an effort was made to have the first four presidents the four commanders of that army in the order of their service.

Unfortunately, party feeling, so soon after the war, still ran high and it made itself conspicuous when the nominations for president were made. McClellan seemed to be the natural selection, and as his name was most frequently mentioned, he, with characteristic modesty, called General Burnside to the chair. McClellan, Meade, Sheridan, Hancock, Pleasonton, Slocum, Humphreys and Burnside were all placed in nomination. Sheridan asked to be excused as he had nominated Meade, but his name was not withdrawn. On

The first call for seventy-five thousand troops seemed preposterously large, and untried officers found themselves confronted with a difficult problem. Those were fortunate who were not called upon to solve it until later

the first ballot the vote stood: McClellan, 164; Sheridan, 142; Meade, 111; and Humphreys and Burnside, each 1.

No candidate having received a majority, a second ballot was taken, with this result: Sheridan, 204; McClellan, 152; and Meade, 34. Sheridan was then conducted to the chair amid general acclamations, while McClellan and many of his adherents quietly left the hall. Sheridan, though very popular, had not commanded the Army of the Potomac, and McClellan no doubt felt the slight very deeply. But he made no exhibition save a continuous absence from the reunions until the meeting in Washington, D. C., in 1883. On this occasion he attended the banquet and responded to the toast of "The Army of the Potomac." When he arose to speak and his presence was then first made known, his old comrades, of whom about four hundred were present, arose en masse, and for at least five minutes an enthusiasm which beggars description ensued. At length, quiet being restored, he proceeded to make the first public reply to his critics and detractors. He reviewed his connection with that army from the time he took command in Washington until his retirement. He spoke of them as "more to me than mere comrades, more than brothers in arms, you were as my very children." The address, which occupies less than three pages of the printed report, was calm, dispassionate, but full of pointed and patriotic allusions. He was frequently interrupted by cheers and wild applause, and no one present had any doubt after that of the place he held in the hearts of the men who followed him in the great struggle. In closing he said: "That army which it was my fortune to organize and create, which, under my command, became an army of veterans, which under me first received its baptism in that sea of fire and blood through which for four long years it plunged with uplifted banners, and bearing on its bayonets the life of the nation until it emerged at Appomattox—the Grand Army of the Potomac—I, as its earliest and only living commander, am proud to believe stands the equal of any of the historic armies of the world, in efficiency, in valor and achievement. I was right when in the beginning of our campaign I said to you that that man's measure of honor and glory would be filled to overflowing who could say that he belonged to the Army of the Potomac." I believe this was his first and last appearance, for a few years after he joined the ranks of the living on the "other side of the water."

in the war, when they had learned by experience how to manage and maneuver large bodies of men. Some brilliant soldiers failed in their first efforts, who, had they been summoned later to command, would have won unfading laurels. It is not necessary to name them. They are known to all who are familiar with the history of the war. McClellan is numbered as one of these. There never was a nation before which contained so many theoretical warriors, who, with pens dipped in gory ink, fought grand battles in the retirement of their dingy sanctums, or told how unsuccessful engagements might have been grand victories had General This and That only done thus and so; and the merchant at his desk, the lawyer in the forum, the preacher in his study, and the schoolboy in his pinafore pointed out the mistakes of the generals, and showed how easily they might have pierced the center or doubled up the flanks, and bagged the entire Confederate army on each and every occasion, when the soldiers who were on the ground were unable to accomplish that very desirable result. The great trouble was that these suggestions were in the nature of a post mortem, which, while it may benefit science, is of small importance to the corpse.

His first efforts were directed toward weeding out inefficient officers, and several hundred were sent to their homes. Regiments were formed into brigades and brigades into divisions. As few officers at that time were competent to command a greater force than a division, the organization of corps was deferred until later. In fact, he directed every detail necessary to perfect the complex machine which was to remain practically intact until the close of the war.

Nor did he overlook the importance of fortifications and intrenchments. It has been charged that McClellan depended too much upon the pick and the spade, but the country reaped the benefit of his foresight and skill as an engineer and digger when Early's entrance into Washington was barred only by the magnificent line of fortifications which were built by McClellan's orders and under

his supervision. Later, our troops profited in every engagement by improvised defenses of earth, stone, rails and trees, and never lost an opportunity to work like beavers and dig like moles when in the presence of a wily, skillful, brave and powerful foe. A great marshal of France once said that "Whoever has committed no faults has never made war," and it is not claimed by any one that McClellan was infallible; but subsequent history proved that his plans, in their general characteristics, were the best, and especially the plan which made the James River the base for the approach to and final capture of Richmond. It is true that the second great commander chose the land route, but his famous and persistent march by the left flank finally brought him to the James with the loss of a greater number than General McClellan had under his command at any time on the Peninsula. Grant had the men, and the hammering process was considered sufficiently disastrous to the Confederate army to justify our sacrifice; for it was said that at that time the South had already robbed the cradle and the grave to fill its depleted ranks. About one point there has never been any dispute. When McClellan left Alexandria for the Peninsula, the army of McDowell, near Fredericksburg, some forty thousand men, was under his command and was expected to co-operate with him. But his force was scarcely landed at Yorktown before the authorities at the Capital withdrew that force from McClellan's control, lest by uncovering Washington the Confederates might make a dash and capture it. It was not until Grant took supreme command, with the positive assurance from President Lincoln that he would not be interfered with by the civil authorities, that they learned the truth of McClellan's statement that the place to protect and defend Washington was in front of Richmond.

His original plan, known as the Anaconda plan, was the plan adopted by his immortal successor as general-in-chief, and indeed the only rational plan by which to conquer over so vast a territory.

It was undoubtedly McClellan's purpose to attack the

Army of Northern Virginia at Manassas, and to attempt the capture of Richmond by the land route. The long delay in front of Manassas aroused much dissatisfaction, but the impracticability of following an enemy through one hundred miles in his own territory, and keeping up communication with a base of supplies, asserted itself. McClellan thereupon surprised the country by quietly transferring his entire army to a new base on the James River, thus compelling the Confederates to return to the protection of their menaced Capital. The withdrawal of McDowell's force from active co-operation was a serious blow. But the advance up the Peninsula was made. Yorktown was evacuated, Williamsburg was won, and soon the Union forces were encamped in sight of the spires of Richmond. There is not space here to give the movements and engagements in detail. The unchecked advance, the subsequent reverses, the skillful retreats, with the magnificent battle of Fair Oaks, and the terrific repulse of the enemy at Malvern Hill, which are among the most noted engagements of the war, can receive but passing mention here. At Fair Oaks the enemy lost their leader—Johnston—and seven thousand men, while our loss was but five thousand, and it was learned subsequently that the people of Richmond momentarily awaited the tramp of our forces in the streets of their Capital; and had our own army, after its terrible struggle of seven days' continuous fighting, been reinforced and thus enabled to assume the offensive, it could even then have marched into that stronghold. In the campaign, our loss was a little over fifteen thousand, while the Confederate loss was over nineteen thousand. Victory was on the side of the Confederates, for the siege of Richmond was raised, but the *morale* of our army was not destroyed, or its confidence in its leader shaken. Had the army been then reinforced, even if placed under another leader, it is asserted by soldiers of acknowledged wisdom and experience, that ultimate success would have been reached within a year—some say six months. Says Swinton, in summing up the results of the campaign: "For the com-

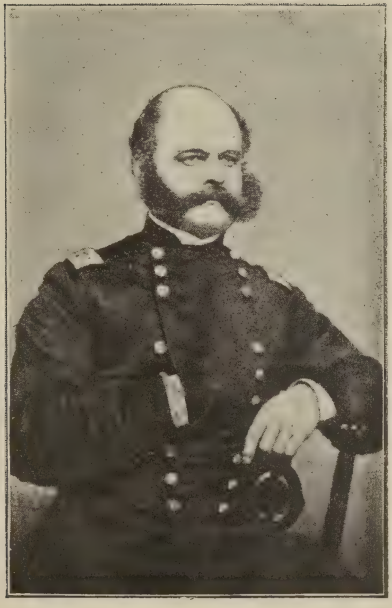
mander to have extricated his army from a difficult situation, in which circumstances quite as much as his own fault had placed it, and in presence of a powerful, skillful and determined adversary, to have transferred it to a position whence it could act with effect, was of itself a notable achievement. For the army to have fought through such a campaign was creditable, and its close found inexperienced troops transformed into veteran soldiers; and, if alone from the appeal which great suffering and great sacrifices always make to a generous people, the story of that eventful march and arduous retreat, when, weary and hungry and footsore, the army marched by night and fought by day through a whole week of toil and never gave up, but made a good fight and reached the goal, cannot fail to live in grateful remembrance."

The authorities at Washington, deeming further efforts on the Peninsula useless, withdrew the army, leaving McClellan practically without a command. A new commander was called from the West to lead the discomfited but not dispirited forces.

I was on duty in the defenses south of Washington when General Pope fought and lost the second battle of Bull Run. Only those who were present can realize the consternation, amounting almost to panic, which existed in that city when the stragglers from that army, hatless, shoeless and ragged, swarmed by thousands in the streets of the Capital. It was the darkest period in the history of the war. Demoralization ran riot, and the authorities were wild with excitement and fear. All eyes were turned toward the little commander whose army had but recently been taken from him. Had he been less a man and a patriot, he would have rejected the offer to resume command of his army; but he did not. His reassignment acted like magic. Immediately out of chaos came order; the nation once more breathed freely, and courage took the place of despair. Active traitors, cowards and malcontents who had been stirring up sedition and opposition in the rear, and who were more dangerous to the safety of the Union than the open and avowed enemies with

arms in their hands, were again cowed and dared not carry on their schemes for dissolution in the light of day. With scarce two weeks to equip and rehabilitate a dispirited army, he met the exultant enemy at Antietam, and defeated and drove them across the Potomac. He has been censured for not following up this victory, and so was the gallant Meade because he did not capture or drive the enemy into the river after the grand repulse at Gettysburg. On both occasions the great and glorious Army of the Potomac had been sorely pressed by three days of most terrible fighting, and the commanders, uninformed of the demoralization of their foes, were unwilling to risk a pursuit which they feared might deprive them of the immeasurable benefit of their victories. But both had accomplished great results: they had driven back the invaders of the North and saved the nation.

The enemy crossed the Potomac, and sought rest in the Shenandoah Valley. Of the seventy thousand men with which Lee entered Maryland, thirty thousand were killed, wounded or prisoners of war. The invasion had utterly failed of its purpose in rallying Marylanders to the Confederate standard, for the people were apathetic, and, instead of receiving a welcome as friends, they found themselves under the disadvantage, which confronted our troops almost always during the war, of campaigning in an enemy's country. After a month spent in replenishing supplies and putting the army in condition for an advance, McClellan, by a skillfully concealed movement, reached Warrenton, completely severing the Confederate army, a part of which had been detached to Culpeper, while the rest remained in the Shenandoah Valley. Here was McClellan's opportunity, and it was his purpose to fall upon each wing and beat it in detail, when the order came from Washington relieving him from the command of the army. The order was summary and brief: "By direction of the President of the United States, it is ordered that Major-General McClellan be relieved from the command of the Army of the Potomac, and that Major-General Burnside take command of that army." No



MAJOR-GENERAL A. E. BURNSIDE, U. S. A.

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reason was assigned, and the order fell like a thunderbolt upon the troops, who loved this commander as they never loved one before or after. The scene was memorable, and characteristic of the man. It is related that Burnside was in McClellan's tent when the order was received. McClellan opened the dispatch, and reading it, passed it quickly and without any manifestation of emotion to Burnside, saying: "Well, Burnside, you are to command the army." Burnside, who felt his inability and shrank from the responsibility, was almost overcome with emotion. But I have not space to prolong the interview. McClellan withdrew in a few days, and his active career as a soldier was ended. Of this sudden and arbitrary removal Swinton, in his history of the Army of the Potomac, says: "Having accomplished his work of expelling Lee from Maryland, he entered, after a brief repose, on a new campaign of invasion, and it was in the midst of this and on the eve of a decisive blow that he was suddenly removed. The moment chosen was an inopportune and ungracious one, for never had McClellan acted with such vigor and rapidity, never had he shown so much confidence in himself or the army in him. And it is a notable fact that not only was the whole body of the army, rank and file as well as officers, enthusiastic in their affection for his person, but that the very general appointed as his successor was the strongest opponent of his removal."

General Burnside reluctantly assumed command, and after remaining ten days at Warrenton formed the six corps of the Army into three grand divisions of two corps each, placing the right, the center and the left grand divisions under Generals Sumner, Hooker and Franklin respectively. In spite of the opposition of the authorities at Washington, General Burnside changed the line of maneuver and on November 15, 1862, moved toward Fredericksburg. On the 17 the advance reached Falmouth, and the army in a few days took up a position on the north side of the Rappahannock. On the 11th and 12th of December the troops crossed over, and on the

13th commenced the disastrous battle of Fredericksburg. The Confederates were fully prepared, the character of the ground being most favorable to the defense. The action of that day was sufficiently convincing to the principal corps and division commanders of the necessity of recrossing the river, but Burnside determined to renew the conflict on the following day. Preparations were accordingly made, but, yielding to the entreaties of Sumner, Burnside desisted. The troops remained in position on the 14th and 15th, and on the night of the 15th, in a violent storm, they retreated to their camps on the north side of the Rappahannock, completely outwitting Lee, who still awaited a renewal of the onslaught. The Army of the Potomac lost twelve thousand, three hundred, in killed, wounded and missing, and the Army of Northern Virginia five thousand, three hundred and nine. This battle has been fitly described as the "most bloody and the most useless of the war."

On the 19th of January, 1863, Burnside essayed another crossing above Fredericksburg, but a heavy rain came on, and the celebrated abortive "mud march" was abandoned. No other movement of importance was or could be made under Burnside, in whose ability to command so large a force the army had lost confidence. Both Generals Franklin and Smith wrote the President advising against the advance to Richmond by that route and recommending a return to the Peninsula. President Lincoln, while refusing to accept this suggestion, relieved the situation by retiring Burnside and placing General Joseph Hooker in command. It is notable that Burnside never lost the respect and affection of the army, and his subsequent career served to endear him still more closely to his troops and to the country.

Hooker had gained a great reputation as a corps commander, and much was hoped for. The army at this time numbered about 120,000 artillery and infantry, 12,000 cavalry and 400 guns. It comprised seven corps—the First (General Reynolds), Second (General Couch), Third (General Sickles), Fifth (General Meade), Sixth (General

Sedgwick), Eleventh (General Howard), and Twelfth (General Slocum). The reorganization left out several most valuable officers whose loss was greatly felt and deplored. Hooker awaited the return of good roads and better fighting conditions, and on the 27th of April the movement began which culminated in the bloody and disastrous defeat at Chancellorsville. Concerning this, I shall not enter into particulars, but will commend the inquirer to the published account of Colonel A. C. Hamlin, who has made an exhaustive examination and study of this field and conflict. His work will serve, to some extent, at least, to set at rest many disputes, and in the minds of some, at least, to place the blame for the failure of this brilliantly planned but badly executed battle where it properly belongs. The death of Stonewall Jackson was an irreparable loss to the Confederate army, and from this time on the cause of the South began to wane.

The army, not knowing why it was beaten, was again on the north side of the Rappahannock, strong in its ability to overcome the rebellion, but distrustful of its leader. Flushed with victory, Lee took up the offensive and determined to carry the war again across the border. Hooker had no alternative but to follow him on interior lines and endeavor to head him off. There were spirited cavalry engagements at Beverly's Ford, Brandy Station and Aldie, in which the cavalry showed their mettle and developed Lee's intentions. The Confederate force pushed along into Maryland and Pennsylvania, its advance raiders levying contributions on York, and threatening the capital of the Keystone State. Hooker finding himself embarrassed by the refusal of General Halleck to comply with his request for more troops and the evacuation of Harper's Ferry, asked to be relieved on the 27th of June, and on the following morning General Meade was placed in command. He at once commenced to concentrate the army to meet Lee, and the various movements finally brought the two great forces face to face at Gettysburg. Here the war reached high-water mark. After three days of desperate fighting, a new emphasis

was given to the nation's birthday, for the 4th of July found the beaten Confederates in full retreat, no more to return to Northern soil, except as peaceful citizens of a redeemed and reunited nation.

Gettysburg was the Confederate Waterloo. With the coincident fall of Vicksburg and the cutting of the Confederacy in twain, all hope of success through foreign recognition or other means was dashed. Lee retired to the Shenandoah Valley, followed by Meade, and after various diversions attended with unimportant results, the victorious Army of the Potomac drove the enemy across the Rapidan and took up a position at and near Culpeper Court House, on the north side of the river. The Eleventh and Twelfth Corps were detached and sent to Tennessee. Various strategic movements were undertaken by Lee, but no general engagement was brought on, though the affair at Bristol would have been so considered earlier in the war. There was a handsome brush also at Rappahannock Station, where the Confederates lost 1,500 prisoners, four guns and eight standards, and an unsuccessful attack at Mine Run. The army then went into winter quarters at Culpeper, the cavalry keeping off ennui by two raids, in one of which (a reckless attempt to enter Richmond and release Union prisoners) the brave Colonel Dahlgren lost his life.

On the 2d of March General Grant was confirmed as lieutenant-general and on the 10th he was assigned to the command of all the armies of the United States. He at once went to General Meade's headquarters, and after due consideration concluded to remain in the field with the Army of the Potomac. It then comprised three corps, the First under General Hancock, the Fifth under General Warren and the Sixth under General Sedgwick, to which was added the Ninth Corps under General Burnside, but recently returned from East Tennessee. General Sheridan was transferred from the West to command the cavalry, General H. J. Hunt was chief of artillery, Major J. C. Duane chief engineer, and General Rufus Ingalls chief quartermaster. The division commanders were:

of the Second Corps, Barlow, Gibbon, Birney and Mott; of the Fifth Corps, Griffin, Robinson, Crawford and Wadsworth; of the Sixth Corps, Wright, Getty and Ricketts; of the Ninth Corps, Stevenson, Potter, Willcox and Ferrero; of the cavalry, Torbert, Gregg and Wilson. The command numbered about 140,000 available men.

On the 3d of May the most bloody of all the campaigns of the war was inaugurated. The movement by the left flank is immortalized in song and story, and the epigrammatic sentence of Grant, "We will fight it out on this line if it takes all summer," takes position alongside of the sententious "*Veni! Vidi! Vici!*" of Cæsar. The battle of the Wilderness, May 5 to 7, was a drawn battle. Our loss was 15,000 and that of the Confederates about 8,000. His greatly superior force, however, enabled Grant to push on. At Spottsylvania there was another terrific engagement, regarded by careful historians as the fiercest and most sanguinary of the whole war. The breastworks on both sides were frequently lost and retaken. After twenty hours of fighting, Lee withdrew and reformed his lines. Our loss was about 8,000, and that of the Confederates, who came out from behind their entrenchments, was probably equally as great. Here the noble Sedgwick fell. Efforts, however, to dislodge the enemy, after ten days' maneuvering, proving fruitless, Grant again took up the line of march. Forty thousand men had fallen, and the outlook was not encouraging. Sheridan with the cavalry had gone on a raid, and succeeded in defeating the Confederate cavalry at Yellow Tavern, killing General J. E. B. Stuart, the ablest cavalry leader in the Southern armies. Co-operative movements were also going on in the Shenandoah Valley and at Bermuda Hundred, but all eyes were turned upon the Army of the Potomac. Grant crossed the North Anna, but finding that route impracticable, recrossed and passed on across the Pamunkey, where he struck his new base of supplies by the York River. But there was still more fighting to be done to secure Cold Harbor, which it was necessary if practicable to hold. The fearful repulse here resulted, in the incred-

ibly short space of ten minutes, in the loss of 13,000 men, while the Confederate's loss was claimed to be less than 2,000. The army was then withdrawn to the south side of the James River preparatory to the siege of Richmond. The overland campaign had been again unsuccessful and the intrepid army found itself, in June, 1864, practically where it was in the summer of 1862 and Richmond still defiant. The failure of Butler to capture Petersburg by assault rendered a long siege necessary. The mine fiasco and the attack on the Weldon road, the fights at Reams Station and Hatcher's Run, were among the principal features of the siege.

Meanwhile, the anaconda was rapidly tightening its hold upon the Confederacy. Sheridan in the Shenandoah Valley with the cavalry, the Sixth, the Eighth and part of the Nineteenth Corps, had redeemed that section, and in March, after destroying the railroads and canal *en route*, came out at City Point. Winchester and Cedar Creek are a part of the laurels of the Army of the Potomac, and the corps shipped to the West also gave a most satisfactory account of themselves. Lee created a diversion by an attack on Washington, but the opportune arrival of the Sixth Corps saved the city.

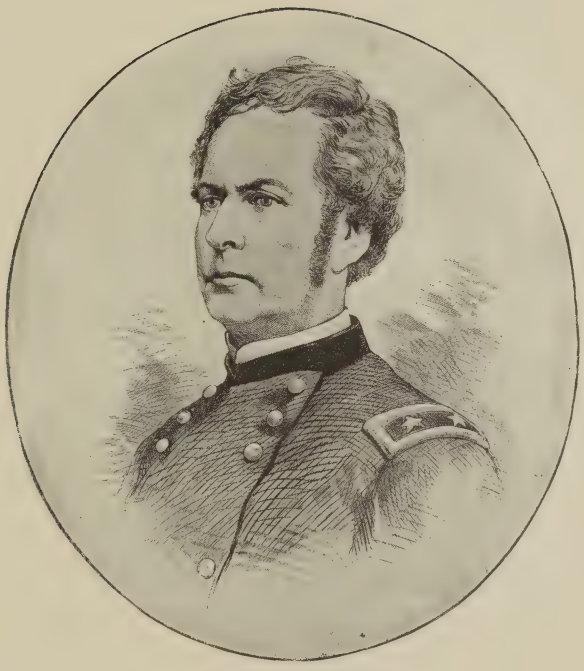
At length everything was ready, and General Grant fixed March 29 as the day for the final movement for the capture of the Confederate Capital. The Army of the Potomac was reinforced by the Army of the James, under General Ord. It comprised two divisions of the Twenty-fourth Corps (General Gibbon), one division of the Twenty-fifth Corps (General Birney), and a small body of cavalry, a division only in name, under General McKenzie. The organization of the Army of the Potomac at this time, under General Meade, included the Second Corps (General Humphreys), Fifth Corps (General Warren), Sixth Corps (General Wright), Ninth Corps (General Parke), and Sheridan's cavalry. The division commanders were: of the Second Corps, Miles, Hays and Mott; of the Fifth, Griffin, Ayres and Crawford; of the Sixth, Wheaton, Getty and Seymour; of the Ninth, Willcox,

Potter and Hartranft; of the cavalry, Merritt (commanding corps), Devin, Custer and Crook.

The development of the enemy at Five Forks, and the three days of pitched battle, the flight of Davis from Richmond, the general advance of the army and capture of Richmond, the rapid pursuit of Lee and running fight, the sanguinary conflict with the rear guard at Sailors' Creek, and the surrender at Appomattox, completed the work of as magnificent an army as the world ever saw.

Its duty done, it returned to Washington to receive the nation's plaudits in one last grand review, and then it melted away into peaceful pursuits, to enjoy the blessings which it helped to secure and perpetuate.

In the address of the late General Francis A. Walker before the Society of the Army of the Potomac at Portland, in 1890, he depicted with masterly hand that great review, and, in concluding, said: "Yes, comrades, our day is over. Mustered out of service, enfeebled by years, disabled by wounds, we are no longer to be counted even among the military reserve of the country. Another war, should it occur, would have to be fought by younger and stronger hands than ours. But no one can take from us our certificates of honorable discharge, or diminish the part we had in the nation's deliverance. Whenever we see the statue of one of our heroes dedicated amid the applause of thousands, and the thunders of cannon, whenever we see some crippled veteran halting in his steps, each of us may stand up and proudly cry: 'I, too, was of the Army of the Potomac!'"—From Frank Leslie's Illustrated Magazine.



Major-General Joseph Hooker, U. S. A.

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THE PHANTOM COLUMN.*

BY

GEN. HORATIO C. KING, LL.D.

* Read at the Re-union of the Society of the Army of the Potomac at Niagara Falls, N. Y., September 1, 1898.

THE PHANTOM COLUMN.

Under the stars the veteran lay,
His wearied form upon the sod;
The aged sire had tramped all day
Over the fields where armies trod.
The full-orbed moon from cloudless skies
Poured silver sheen on shrub and trees.
The patriot slept, his weary eyes
Soothed by the gentle evening breeze.

In dreams the slowly circling years
Rolled swiftly back on Memory's wings,
And war with all its pomp and tears,
Its grim and ghastly happenings,
Passed in review, and one by one
The grand array of noble men,
Their conflicts past, their battles done,
The old man's vision filled again.

The roll of drum, the scream of fife,
The blare of bugles rent the air,
The gallant dead awoke to life
And filled the landscape everywhere;
The restless charger, mad with fear,
Rushed blindly o'er the gory plain,
And shrieking shot alarmed the ear,
And thickly fell like drops of rain.

McClellan.

From out the dread confusion rose
The form beloved, to all most dear,
Of little Mac, in calm repose,
And to the roll call answered "Here!"
Before him surged the restless tide
Of battle desperate and wild;
Antietam's meadows, far and wide,
Beheld our emblem undefiled.

His brain it was that formed the plan;
His hand that shaped the vast machine
That from the crude, untutored man
Made living bulwarks, stern of mien;
And twice when foes demoniac
The hearts of patriots unnerved,
He drove the stubborn rebels back—
The nation's Capital preserved.

Sleep, soldier, still in honored rest."
Thy voice is silent, but thy name
In comrades' hearts the tenderest
Shall live to everlasting fame.
And to thy grave in countless years
Shall loving generations press
To dew the grass with grateful tears
And evermore thy memory bless.

Burnside.

With varying fortunes rolled the battle's tide,
And hope and fear held counsel side by side.
Here on the left must fall the desperate fight,
And take the pressure from the faltering right.
Once peaceful stream now trembling with the shock
Of angry armies standing firm as rock,
Thy limpid waters will be crimson dyed
With blood fraternal, and thine emerald side
With lifeless bodies thickly shall be strewn
Ere yonder sun shall tell the hour of noon.

See on yon crest the glistening bayonets rise
And flash defiance in their foemen's eyes!
And now again the angry cannon roar,
And hell itself holds carnival once more.
"Forward! now charge! Press onward to the ridge!"
And gallant Burnside firmly holds the bridge.
Lo! darkness steals upon the hideous sight
And covers horror with the shield of night:

MAJOR-GENERAL GEORGE G. MEADE, U. S. A.

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The day is ours! Antietam's bloody plain
With war's battalions ne'er shall shake again.

Comrade, farewell! Thy race was nobly run.
A grateful country calls thee "Favored Son;"
And babbling sires, in ages far away,
Shall tell the story of that fateful day
When Burnside took the bridge, and joyful cry,
"In truth it was a famous victory!"

HOOKER.

Where Rappahannock's muddy current flows
Swift to Potomac's clearer waters, rose
With magic speed a city vast and dense,
Alive with agents of God's recompense.
The dingy tents o'erspread the extended plain,
Through miles of streets the wearied eye in vain
Sought limit to the scene. Along the banks
The frowning batteries stood in sullen ranks,
While gayly fluttering from unnumbered masts,
Saluted by the bugle's piercing blasts,
The old flag floated, whose resplendent stars
Still shone undaunted o'er the "Stars and Bars:"
No stripe besmirched, each brilliant star in place,
The glorious emblem of God's noblest race.
The ancient town that burrowed in the hills,
Unhappy victim of war's desperate ills,
Lay sleeping all unconscious of the flood
That on the morrow stained its streets with blood.
And now the bugle and the rattling drum
Arouse the soldier from his dream of home.
The neighing steeds, impatient for the fray,
Awake the echoes of the dawning day.
"By right flank, forward!" and the mighty mass
The surging waters of the river pass,
And at the head, all heedless of the foe,
The impassive features of our "Fighting Joe."

Farewell, courageous heart! thy honored name
Is written high upon the roll of fame.
And youthful patriots shall thy valor know
While lingering o'er the deeds of "Fighting Joe."

Meade.

Fair were the fields that peaceful July day
And sweet the air with scent of new-mown hay;
And Gettysburg's serene, enchanted plain
Emblazoned shone with waves of golden grain.

The western ridge where sweet embowered stood
The sacred shrine, half hidden in the wood,
Recked not of war, but echoed with the tread
Of God's sweet messengers of peace who led
The thoughts from earthly things to things above,
And taught the wayward heart that God is love:
While far across the fields of ripened grain
Another ridge uprose from out the plain;
And in its bosom, freed from earthly woes,
The dead of ages lay in calm repose.

Relentless War that cruelly would blot
With brother's blood this consecrated spot.

The vast battalions whetted for the fray
By frequent combats, fierce from day to day,
Now face to face in hostile posture stand
Intent to drench with blood their native land.

Lo! from their midst a puff of smoke and then
The quick advance of twenty thousand men,
A solid line of veterans clad in gray,
With rigid nerves and earnest for the fray;
In dreams a vigorous nation rose to sight,
The "Stars and Bars" emblazed in glorious light.

On, on they came, nor faltered in their tread,
Each man a hero—giants at their head.
We stand enthralled at courage so sublime—
No nobler record on the page of time—
And saddened hearts in deepest sorrow pause
To mourn such courage in so sad a cause.

With bristling bayonets glistening in the sun,
The stubborn ranks, inspired by victories won,
Pressed grimly on, unmindful of the storm
Of shot and shell that felled full many a form,
Until an earthquake shook the startled earth,
As though the fiends of hell were given birth.
The Federal guns now belched volcanic wrath,
Which carried untold misery in its path.
Still on they came; the gaps they quickly close.
"Now fire!" and from our serried ranks there rose
A wild hurrah, and swift the leaden hail
Fell on the rebel lines. See! now they quail!
"Strike! strike! for freedom and your native land!"
And bayonets clashed in contests hand to hand.
Oh, fierce the struggle, but they break! they fly!
And God to Freedom gives the victory!

Napoleon's sun went down at Waterloo,
And Wellington's immortal rose to view:
While history lasts the grateful eye shall read
Our Wellington in brave, victorious Meade.

Here on this field a dire darkness fell
On Southern hopes, and history will tell
With caustic pen how vengeful was the hate
That spurred their leaders to more bitter fate—
That filled the beauteous Southern hills and dales
With countless graves and Sorrow's saddest wails.
The cause was lost; thrice happy day for her!
From slavery redeemed, she rises conqueror.

Under the stars the soldier slept,
And fast the phantom column passed;
Hancock and Kearny by him swept,
And Doubleday with columns massed;
And Couch, Ord, Slocum, Reynolds too,
And Warren, Sedgwick, and the brave
Old Wadsworth marched in grand review
The path of glory to the grave;
And Sheridan, and last of all
Immortal Grant, and by his side
The martyred Lincoln, at whose call
Unnumbered thousands fought and died.

A smile lit up the old man's face,
A benediction lingered on his tongue,
"God bless our land! God bless our race!"
And then the curtain down was rung.

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